

THE RUSH TO THE KLONDIKE OVER THE MOUNTAIN PASSES.

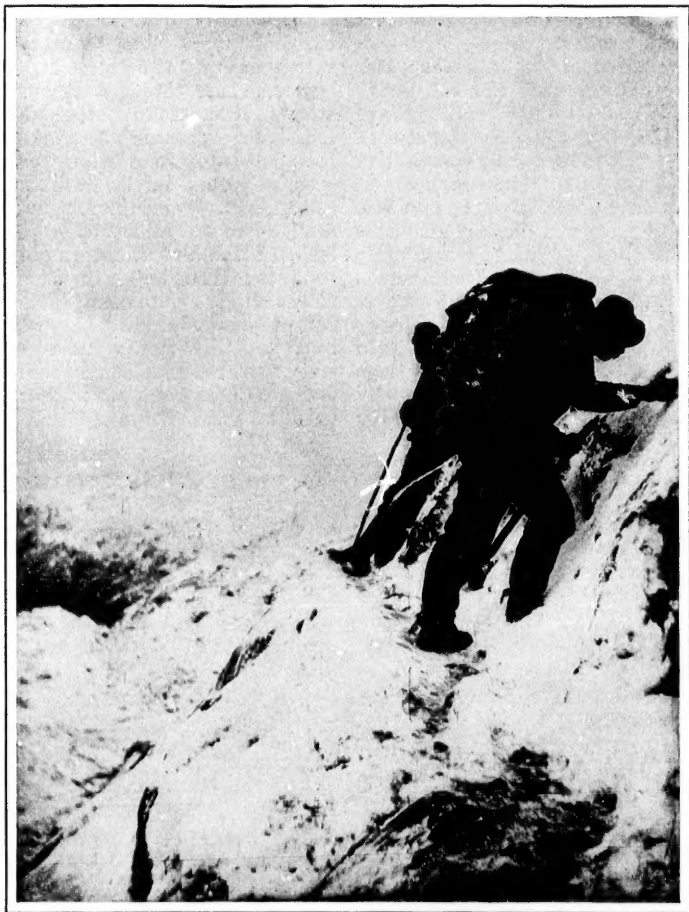
BY EDWARD S. CURTIS.

PICTURES FROM PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR.

THE astonishing rush to the new gold-fields of Alaska and the Northwest Territory during the latter half of 1897 is a distinct feature in the chronicle of our national events. «Klondike» will stand upon the pages of our history with a prominence equal to, if not greater than, that given to

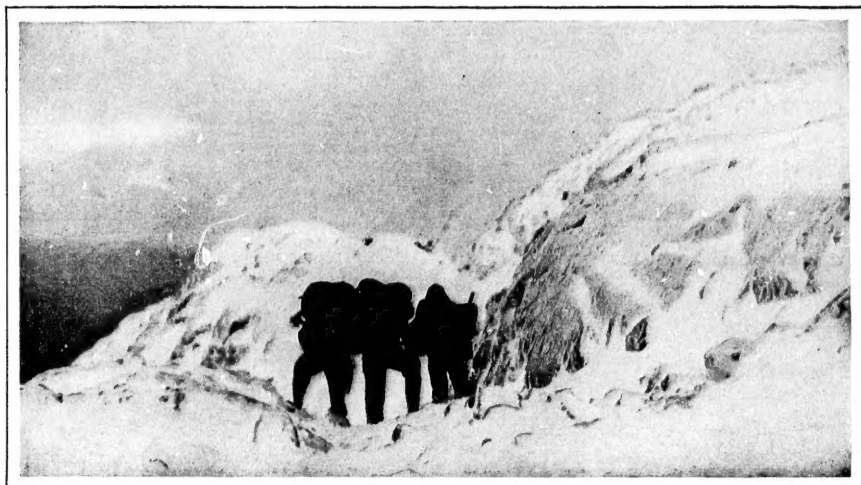
the days of '49; and this, too, despite the fact that the Alaskan movement was then only in its first stages. Last summer's dash to the new El Dorado was only the first breath of an oncoming storm the fury and extent of which cannot be overestimated.

In another sense, the rush of 1897 may be



THE CLIMB TO THE SUMMIT OF CHILKOOT PASS, DYEA TRAIL.

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ON THE SUMMIT OF THE CHILKOOT PASS.

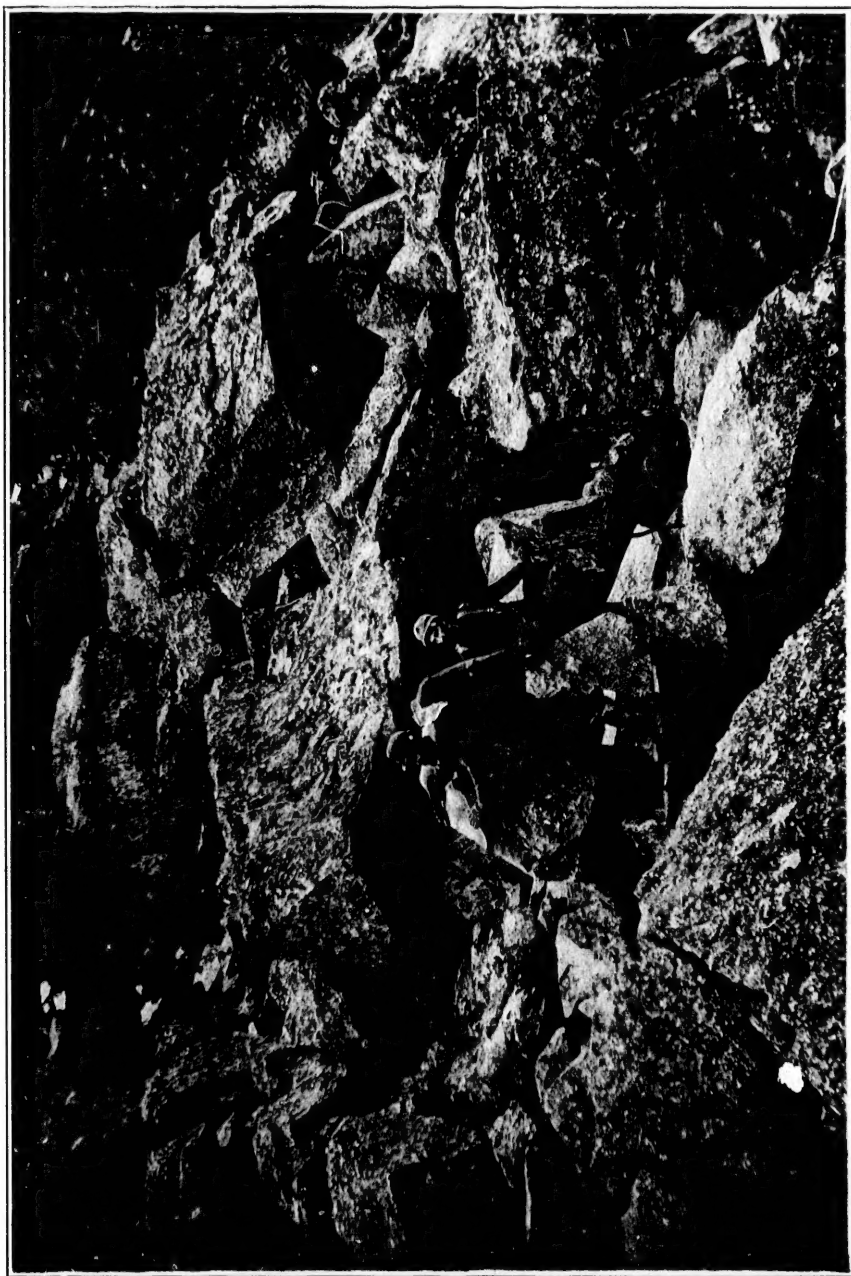
termed the first shock of a great battle which is now waging between invading Man and defending Nature. Lured from the paths of peaceful employment and routine labor by visions of sudden wealth, men rushed into the North unprepared by any certain knowledge of the country, and by the very nature of

their errand antagonistic to any form of organized enterprise. Not only did each man find Nature stern and repulsive, opposing his progress with all her forces, but the lack of transportation facilities soon turned each man into an open enemy to his neighbor.

At the present time, when the second rush

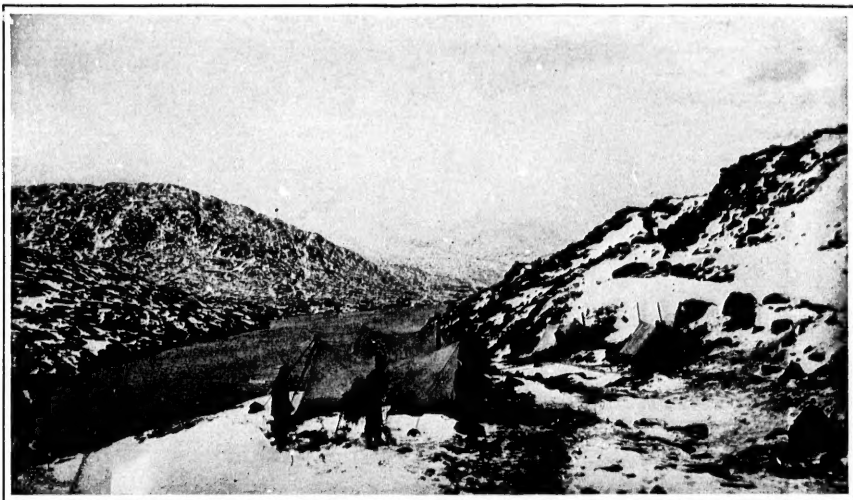


COMING DOWN WITH A LIFE-LINE AT "THE FORD," SKAGUAY TRAIL.



CROSSING A ROCK-SLIDE ON THE «CUT-OFF» TRAIL.

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IN CAMP AT SUMMIT LAKE ON THE SKAGUAY TRAIL.

may soon be expected, it will be interesting to take a glance at the wreckage of the first onset.

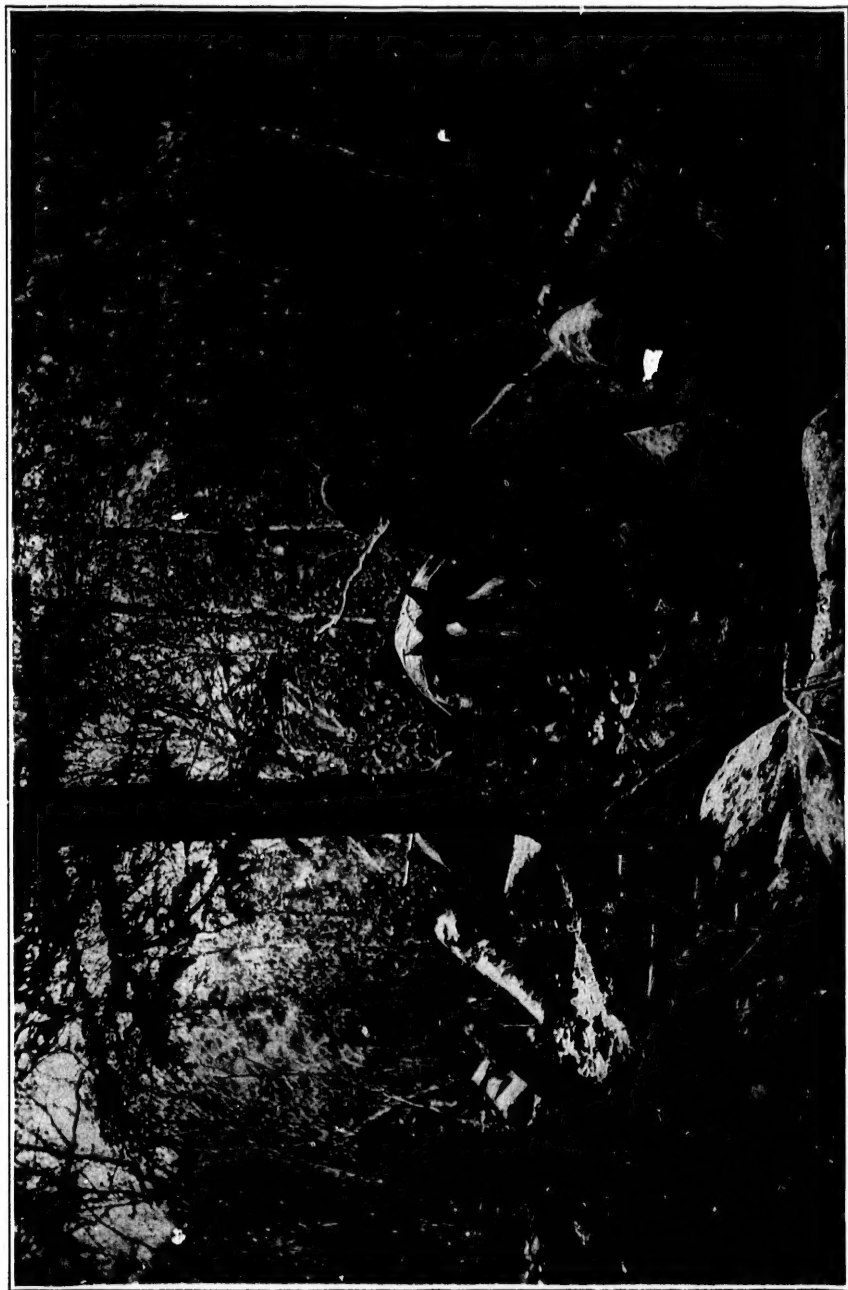
In general, it may be stated that during the rush of 1897 only two routes into the Klondike country were followed. One was called the outside, or all-water route; the other, the overland passage. The outside route was by ocean-steamer from the Pacific-coast cities to St. Michael, Alaska, whence river-boats conveyed the passenger and his outfit, without change, to Dawson City. The overland passage was by ocean-steamer to Skaguay or Dyea, whence the prospector crossed the mountains on foot to the chain of lakes which form the head waters of the Yukon River. Once at these lakes, individual

boats were built, and the long journey down the river began. Hence there was offered the odd picture of men seeking a middle point on a great river, some by ascending, and some by descending, the start being made, in both cases, at the sea-level. Those who ascended the river were first obliged to travel by sea nearly two thousand miles in the very direction in which the river is flowing, and all the way running nearly parallel to its flow, before reaching the river's mouth, thus traveling more than double the distance involved in the overland passage.

Neither of these routes was in any way adequate to the demands suddenly placed upon it. The outside route boasted only a few steamers. Every available craft was



DESERTED HORSES AT THE FOOT OF "THE SUMMIT," SKAGUAY TRAIL.



NEAR THE SUMMIT OF PORCUPINE HILL, SKAGUAY TRAIL.

pressed into service, and in all these, whether steamer or sailer, men, cattle, and freight were crammed in the most uncomfortable manner. More than that, when the river was gained, the river-steamers were too few to accommodate the crowds; and when new boats were constructed, low water and the late season caused delays which finally caught most of the prospectors *en route*, forcing them to camp for the winter where this last misfortune overtook them.

The scenes along the two trails constituting the overland passage were more soul-trying, and presented a desperate picture at the close of the first rush. Men who landed at Skaguay and Dyea thought the worst of their journey over. Both trails are easily passable for a few men at a time, the Skaguay trail, including the White Pass, being the more suitable for the passing of pack-trains. But the crush of men and animals on both these trails was terrific, and became the worst feature of the problem. A multitude of horses' hoofs cut the open parts of the trail into rivers of mire. Pack-trains returning empty from the lakes caused the ascending trains hours of delay. Horses, overloaded or worn out, fell in their tracks; and so warped had men become in their struggle to get over the summits toward the fairyland of Klondike that no friendly hand would be lent to help the owner raise the fallen animal.

But worse than these delays was the destruction of horses which resulted from the frightful condition of the trails. Many animals died from exhaustion; but by far the greater number were destroyed by falling among boulders, the heavy packs nearly always causing broken limbs. Men, starting with horses as a part of their capital, expected to sell them when their own passage was completed. A few succeeded; but the majority lost their horses, and either hired their goods packed over the trails, or were reduced to the necessity of carrying their outfits, bit by bit, on their own backs. It was then that the bitter, desperate, almost unendurable struggle began. The men overworked themselves, ate poorly prepared food, slept in wet clothing; and many there are who, in consequence of these privations, will never regain their full strength. Add to this the previous sacrifice of giving up paying positions at home, in many cases of leaving wife and children almost unprovided with property in order to secure an outfit, and the reader will appreciate the desperate men-

tal condition of the men who daily found resisting Nature becoming more formidable. On top of this place the utter disappointment of the thousands of men who failed to reach Dawson City, and who were obliged to camp where cold weather overtook them, and who are waiting for spring to release them from physical privation and a condition of mental torture produced by gloomy surroundings and unrealized hopes, and the picture of the impotency of the first onslaught upon the out-works of the new gold-fields becomes apparent.

But, gloomy as the picture may be, it is only the natural outcome of the conditions. Men who lift heavy packs over steep hills and rough trails must work slowly and steadily. There is no carrying Nature's forces by assault. Her resisting strength is immeasurable, and man can overcome it only by using brain as well as brawn. Men who contend hand to hand with Nature must protect their health and daily renew their strength; for Nature is just as strong at the end of a day's work as at the beginning.

The men now planning to force a way into Alaska and the Northwestern Territory are better prepared than were the men of '97, and they are planning their campaign with more care. Furthermore, organization has displaced anarchy, and the men of '98 will cross the trails over prepared roads, steel bridges, and steam tramways, where the men of '97 waded through mud, forded streams, and painfully toiled over the summits. And improved methods are visible also on the outside route. A greater fleet of steamers, with greater average tonnage, are to carry men to the Yukon. More river-boats will breast the swift current of this great river. New trails are being tested and new methods put into practice. The battle for wealth will become more desperate, more volunteers will rush to the front; but the signs of victory will be more frequent.

But not all who go will win, and the victors will purchase their triumph dearly. Those most successful in these new gold-fields have said that they would not enter the battle again if twice the stake hung upon the victory. The loss of life was small in the first rush, but Nature took almost the entire assaulting host as prisoners. When she released them, many there were who fell back, broken in purse, worn in body, and despondent in mind. These men made their way home, as best they could, out of the wreckage of the first Klondike rush.